

Basic Descriptive Statistics of Japan Social Well-being Survey

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to clarify factors of subjective well-being from the basic descriptive statistics of a survey of Japan conducted in February 2015 by the Center for Social Well-being Studies at Senshu University. With the survey, we explore how social relationships influence subjective well-being with the concept of social well-being. After first explaining the survey method, we then analyze the effects of income, health condition and security on subjective well-being, and then the relations with family, co-workers, citizen groups and religion.

Keywords: Social well-being, Family, Working environment, Civic engagement, Faith

1 . Introduction

Interest in well-being studies has increased in recent years, as, next to economic growth, subjective well-being has some of the greatest potential for creating social purpose.

However, the qualitative differences between well-being in different cultures has not yet been discussed enough to measure it as a universal concept in every society. Scottish moral philosophers David Hume and Adam Smith argued that well-being is formed when altruistic actions made with sympathy become a purpose for the egoistic interests of individuals (Büschges 1997: 26-27). They distinguish here two types of subjective well-being; one is achieved by selfish satisfaction, and the other is fostered through sympathy and good relationships with others. Of course, many studies have proved that social capital contributes to happiness. Nevertheless, the interest of this paper lies not only in whether social relationships have a positive effect on well-being, but also in how such effect varies with region, gender, and religion. As such, this paper mainly focuses on the relationship between two variables, avoiding complicated multivariate analysis to clarify wider constellations of our survey results. Various factors will need to be controlled for further consideration.

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2. Research Method

This survey of Japan¹ was conducted online in February 2015, commissioned to Nikkei Research Inc. Under the title “International comparative survey on lifestyle and values” we asked a stratified sample of 11,804 registered respondents of the research company questions about their well-being, social capital, and risk and safety network. Samples were stratified by gender, age, population of their municipality of residence, and region², as based on the national census of Japan taken in 2010. Figures 1 and 2 show allocation tables for the samples. The web survey was conducted carefully to ensure credibility. The respondent allocation is practically nationwide.

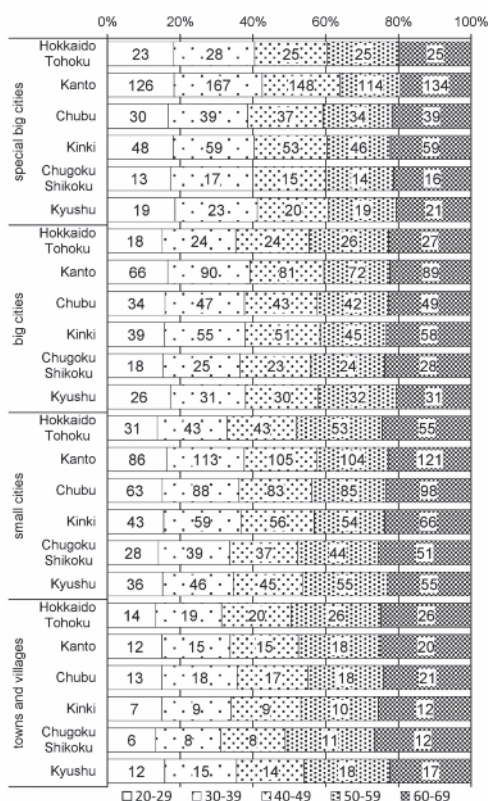


Figure 1: Sample allocation table (female)

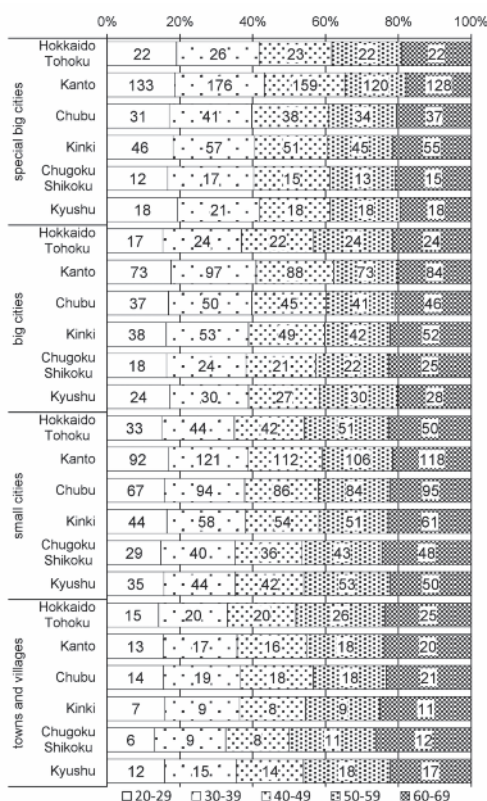


Figure 2: Sample allocation table (male)

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² Age was classified into five segments: 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s and over 60s. Population was classified into the four city categories of the Japanese national census: government designated cities with populations of at least 500,000; big cities of at least 200,000; small cities under 200,000; and towns and villages estimated at about 20,000.

The results were as follows for the objective variable, subjective well-being. The mean value for happiness was 6.25 and the median was 7.00 (see Figure 3). This corresponds with other Japanese surveys on well-being. A score of 8 was the most frequent response, with a score of 6 less frequent than 5 and 7 (Economic and Social Research Institute 2014:20). We also asked respondents about their life satisfaction, which had a mean value of 5.87 and median of 6.00.

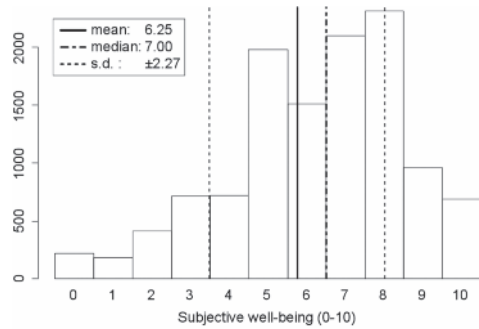


Figure 3: Distribution of subjective well-being (n=11,804)

Happiness and life satisfaction can be regarded as almost the same given the strong positive correlation between the two variables ($r=0.83$, $n=11,804$, $p<0.001$), although there were slight differences. Roughly 50% of people distinguished between the two variables: 52.35% of respondents gave the same score for happiness and life satisfaction, 30.18% scored a difference of one between the variables, 10.50% a difference of two, and 6.98% a difference of three or more.

To define these terms, according to OECD, happiness is influenced by the everyday experience of emotions or feelings, while life satisfaction measure how people evaluate life as a whole. In other words, happiness is a short-term outlook of well-being and depends more on social environment, whereas life satisfaction is more long-term and determined by individual autonomy. Therefore, higher scores for happiness (6.25) than life satisfaction (5.87) may indicate satisfaction with current life but anxiety for the future.

Though we have to analyze more precisely still where this distinction was made, at present we use happiness for subjective well-being as we are interested in current situations and the effects of social environment on well-being.

3 . Income, Health, and Security

This section describes factors influencing well-being which can be built without a direct social relationship: income, health conditions, and security.

To start, the relationship between personal income and well-being in Figure 4 is weaker ($r=0.08$, $p<0.001$), but the effect of household income in Figure 5 is stronger ($r=0.22$, $p<0.001$).

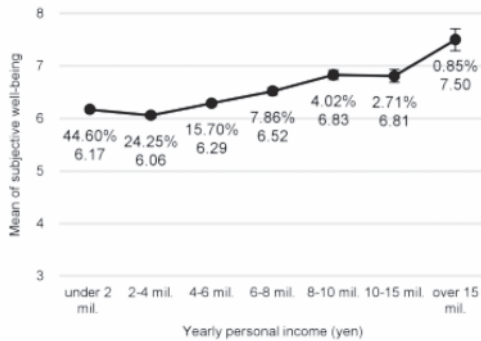


Figure 4. Personal income and well-being (n=11,804)

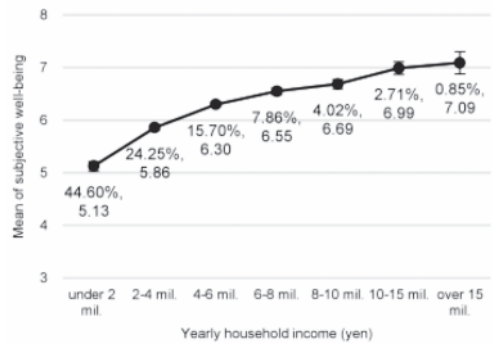


Figure 5. Household income and well-being (n=11,804)

The difference between personal and household income is accounted for in the percentage of non-employed. This refers to those who have no job and are not seeking one, such as students, homemakers, and pensioners. Most of this segment is not unhappy in spite of lower income due to family support or pension benefits. The lowest income group, under 2 million yen (currently about 16 thousand USD), includes more non-employed (52%) than the 2-4 million yen group (13%). Thus, the lowest income group is not unhappiest in Figure 4, but is unhappiest in Figure 5. It follows then that higher income makes people happy, as does life without being overly busy, while lower income without some form of support results in unhappiness. In Section 3, we will attempt to further explain this tendency.

The so-called paradox of well-being can be observed in the results. In Figure 5, well-being and income are strongly correlated in the four income groups under 8 million yen, while the slope levels off in the four groups over 8 million yen. Well-being increases with income to a certain level, above which point more income yields minimal gains in well-being. An explanation of this paradox follows below.

Figure 6 shows the strong negative correlation between well-being and past poverty experience ($r=-0.27$, $p<0.001$), which expresses whether and when respondents experienced poverty. This coefficient is higher than the effect of household income ($r=0.22$, $p<0.001$). What this result suggests is that poverty has a stronger ability to make people unhappy than wealth does in bringing about happiness.

Meanwhile, health satisfaction has a more positive effect on well-being. Its correlation coefficient is $r=0.56$, $p<0.001$ (see Figure 7).

Moreover, removing the impacts of life satisfaction, which simultaneously increases both health

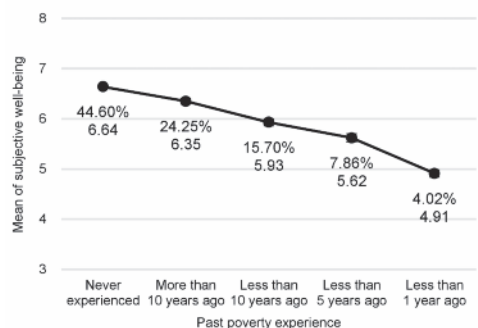


Figure 6. Past poverty experience and well-being (n=11,804)

satisfaction and happiness, the partial correlation of health satisfaction and well-being is $r=0.40$, $p<0.001$. With this control in place, health condition has a yet higher positive influence on well-being.

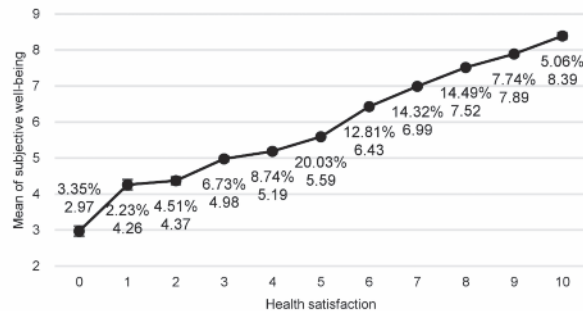


Figure 7. Health satisfaction and well-being (n=11,804)

While we presumed that security is also related to well-being, the correlation is weaker ($r=-0.01$, $p<0.001$). This is illustrated in Figure 8, showing the effect of crime victim experience. The following two points can explain the weak correlation. First, respondents were only asked whether and when they were victimized by crime, not the type of crime. No distinctions were made between minor offenses, such as theft or fraud, and serious crimes, such as violence, rape, or murder. Secondly, close to 90% of respondents have never experienced crime, so the variance is small. Further study on fear of crime or subjective feelings of security could clarify the impact of security on well-being.

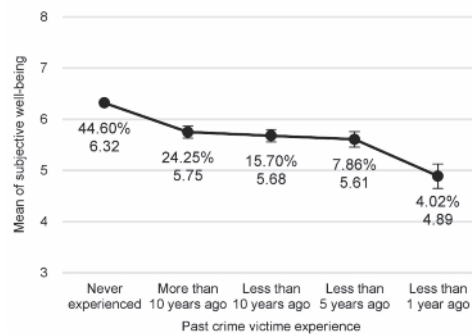


Figure 8. Security and well-being (n=11,804)

4 . Family: The Most Important Factor in Well-being

According to the World Happiness Report, “marriage is one of the unambiguous, universally positive and statistically significant correlates.” It is valid not only in terms of economic advantage, but also mental stability (Helliwell et al. 2012:76). Figure 9 substantiates this view. However, World Happiness Report points out that having children “is no guarantee of higher happiness. The pleasure of parenting depends on the age of the children, on the quality of the parenting couple and on the social context, including having enough time to enjoy family life” (Helliwell et al. 2012:78).

In the survey, having children has positive influence on well-being. As indicated in Figure 10, there is a positive correlation ($r=0.19$, $p<0.001$). On the other hand respondents having four

or more children are less happy than other parents. This suggests that having too many children puts pressure on household stability and does not allow the parents any free time due to caring for their children.

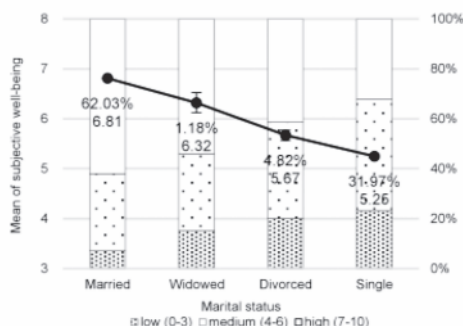


Figure 9: Marital status and well-being (n=11,804)

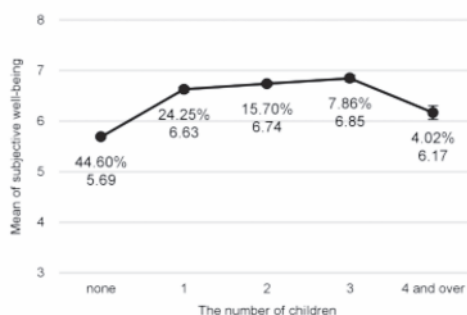


Figure 10: children and well-being (n=11,804)

In terms of family relationships, the report focuses on marriage and children, not on singles. Thus, as a more general question, we asked respondents including them to score their trust in family on a five-point scale (see Figure 11). This showed a strong positive effect ($r=0.35$, $p<0.001$). Family is the factor with the biggest impact on well-being—bigger than any other human relationship.

It would be valid in every society that intimacy with family makes people happy. However, there are many other kinds of relationships, other than with family members. How are family relations concerned with associations? Do they encourage to participate in associations, or prevent them from participation? In the next section, we will analyze this.

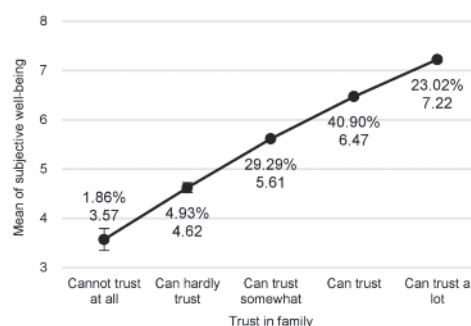


Figure 11. Trust in family and well-being (n=11,804)

5 . Associations: Community Involvement to Compensate for Family

The effect of generalized trust on well-being is more uncertain than trust in family. We asked respondents about their generalized trust in others, whether most people can be trusted. The correlation with well-being results in $r=0.23$, $p<0.001$. Although generalized trust has a positive effect with statistical significance, a negative slope appeared for the highest level. In Figure 12, the mean value of 6.53 for respondents who answered “can trust a lot,” the highest general trust level, is less than the 6.99 for the second highest trust level. The downturn is likely the result of having so few respondents at the highest level, producing a high standard error, while there was no such inflection for trust in family. The trust in family is higher than in most people (see Figure 13). 63.9% of respondents have higher trust in their family (4-5), but there are only 7.7% of respondents who have higher generalized trust (4-5).

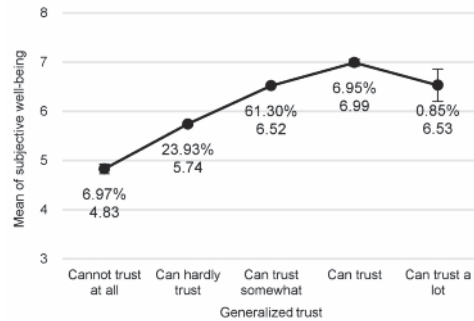


Figure 12. General trust and well-being (n=11,804)

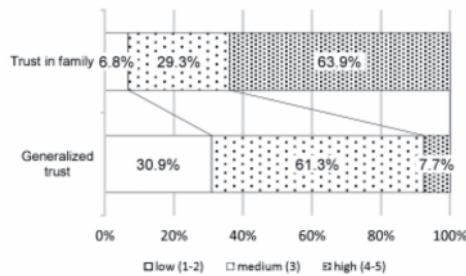


Figure 13: Comparison of trust in family and generalized trust (n=11,804)

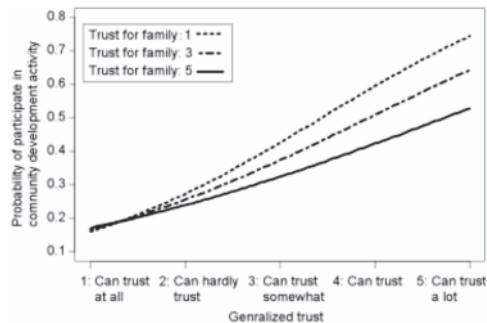


Figure 14: Interaction between trust for family and generalized trust (n=11,804)

A good relationship with one’s family actually prevents social trust from increasing for most people. Of course, trust in family tends to mean increased general trust as well, but on the other hand, it also tends to decrease association involvement. We examined how these two forms of trust relate to the likelihood of community development activities using logistic regression analysis. On the whole, higher general trust increases the probability of active community involvement, and a closer look reveals a negative correlation with trust in family (see Figure 14). The highest intimacy with family at level 5 reduces the probability of community involvement, even though general trust increases, while those with the lowest level of trust in family are more likely to be actively involved in the community than people having close family.

Most people choose either family or association as their source of happiness, not both of

them. This tendency enables to explain why communities are not as vigorously organized in societies such as Japan. With community involvement working as a compensation for family, wider (bridging) social capital can only be formed if family ties are weak.

6 . Labor: The Gender Gap and Well-being

The relationship between labor and well-being in Japan reflects conventional Japanese gender roles. According to The Global Gender Gap Report, the labor force ratio is 0.77 (female to male), with Japan ranked 82th of 144 (World Economic Forum 2015: 52). Before the report, it was already well known that the Japanese workplace is not very open to women participation.

Despite the gender gap, conformance with the conventional gender norm of women staying at home enhances their well-being. In the survey, the well-being of women (averaged 6.52) is clearly higher than men (averaged 5.97) despite the wide income gap between females (averaging 1.7 million yen: 13,600 USD) and males (averaging 4.7 million yen: ca. 39,000 USD). Moreover, in Figure 15, presenting a regression analysis of the relationship between working hours per week and well-being by gender (n=7,976 excluding the non- and unemployed), men's happiness in the workplace increases in proportion to working hours, while women's well-being decreases with more working hours. While no graph is shown here, the opposite is true in the case of homemaking; more time taking care of the home makes women happier but men more unhappy. This raises the question of how to interpret these different effects by gender. The problem must be approached not from the angle of some biological difference or inherent cultural difference, but rather in terms of social conditions.

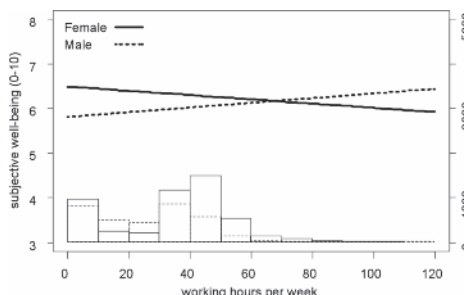


Figure 15. Working hours and well-being by gender (n=8,195)

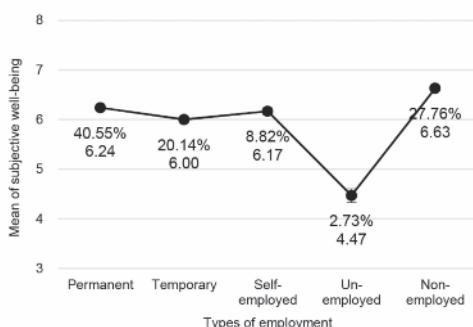


Figure 16: Types of employment and well-being (n=11,804)

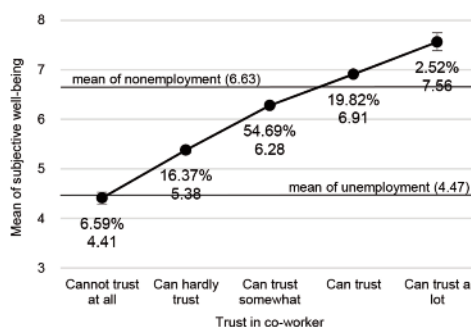


Figure 17: Trust in co-workers and well-being (n=7,976)

One such condition may be the rigid working environment, which forces people to understand that working is essentially hard. As indicated previously, higher income brings well-being in the sense that it prevents poverty. Nevertheless, it does not mean that work itself makes people happy. Figure 16 shows well-being for each state of employment. Here we see that while well-being is lower for the unemployed than the employed, the happiest group is the non-employed. This suggests that life without both poverty and job is the most ideal environment for well-being. Figure 17, showing the relation with trust in co-workers, also supports this view. Although good relationships with co-workers in addition to family has a great influence on well-being ($r=0.30$, $p<0.001$), only about 20% of workers are more satisfied than the non-employed, and most are less happy. Hence, we can say that being a housewife is a rational choice in terms of well-being. One effective means of resolving gender inequality would be to improve co-worker relations and somehow prevent all discrimination and harassment.

7. Religion: Ancestor Worship as an Invisible Faith

Religion has a positive influence on well-being, even in a Japanese society where most people are indifferent to religion. Approximately 66% of respondents said they have no faith (see Table 1), and difference in average well-being between believers (6.49) and non-believers (6.12) is very small, but statistically significant ($t=-8.32$, $p<0.001$). It seems unimportant to analyze this factor. However, when asked the frequency of ancestral celebration rituals called kuyō, descended from Buddhism, the correlation was $r=0.137$, $p<0.001$ (see Figure 18). Moreover, we asked respondents whether they wish to be celebrated after death. This correlation with well-being was $r=0.248$, $p<0.001$ (see Figure 19).

Table 1.

	mean	S.E.	N	%
Buddhism	6.48	0.04	3,281	27.8%
Catholic	6.30	0.26	93	0.8%
Protestant	6.32	0.20	127	1.1%
Islam	5.42	0.54	19	0.2%
Hinduism	6.71	0.78	7	0.1%
Nature worship	6.55	0.13	295	2.5%
The others	6.74	0.19	171	1.4%
No faith	6.12	0.03	7,811	66.2%
			11,804	100%

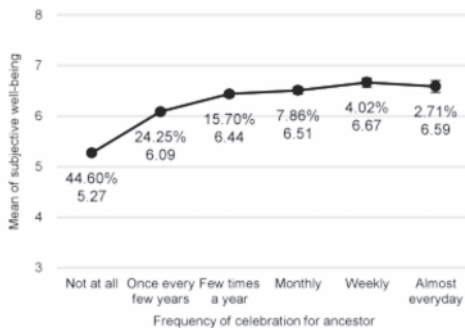


Figure 18: Celebration for ancestor and well-being (n=11,804)

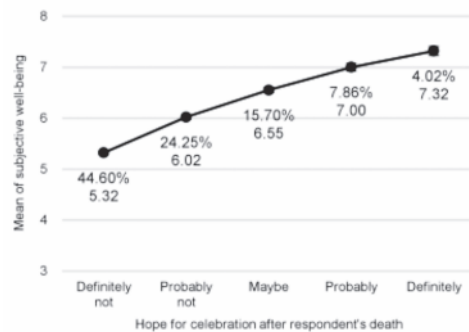


Figure 19: Hope for celebration and well-being (n=11,804)

Whether such rituals qualify as faith is debated, as it is difficult to distinguish the religious worth of venerating one's ancestors from the worth in trusting family in Japanese convention. In any case, there is no doubt that such rituals have positive effect on well-being.

8 . Conclusion

Focusing on well-being and social relationships, family is one of the most important factors and further has broad impacts on other social relationships. Summarizing the effects of trust in the family in the survey, we can speak of familism, which means emotional solidarity symbolized by the family has a strong influence on well-being, and prevents bridging relationships such as associations. In Section 4, we pointed out that intimate family relationships decrease the probability of active involvement in the association. In Section 6, we saw that men tend to be happier with more time working and less happy with more time homemaking, while for women the reverse is true. This tendency likely corresponds with the division of gender roles in a patriarchal society. In Section 7, we clearly established that ancestral celebration rituals, which helps to build good cross-generational relationships in the family, has a positive correlation with well-being, although on the surface, religion in itself has hardly any influence.

Increasing well-being might strengthen outdated conventions. OECD argues the importance of assessing public policy in response to well-being (OECD 2013:36-39). However using well-being to measure policymaking runs the risk of legitimizing social exclusivity. The critical theoretician, Theodor W. Adorno, warns that social pursuit of well-being could be connected to totalitarianism (Rath 1997), because it leaves aside the diversity of happiness and could promote conservative and exclusive values. Well-being varies by gender, generation, social group, class, religion, economy, history, and other factors. Without taking care of these differences, the risk could not be avoided. Furthermore, we have to not only investigate what makes people happy, but also in the results account for how people change with increased well-being, examining whether it will create a more open society or make it more closed. Recognizing different ways of both causes and results can lead to social well-being, which is able to balance open society and individual happiness.

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